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The Reprisal Vs. *Eve's Apology*

During our semester, we've read many different poems about the topics of God and religion. What I've found particularly interesting is the contrast between George Herbert's view on his relationship with God, and Emilie Lanier's. While Herbert shares an intense devotion to God in his poem, Lanier shows a relationship filled with strife. Herbert wishes to save God from his human sins and Lanier seems to meet him with a level of condemnation.

In the fourth stanza of *Eve's Apology*, it's stated that Eve only knew that God had *allegedly* told Adam not to eat of the Tree of Life. This made her more susceptible to his wiles, not just because God had not directly told her of his law, but that in her ignorance she could not have perceived that the snake was attempting to trick her. In her understanding of the world and the snake's persuasion, Eve found herself preferring a god-like wisdom to an ignorant immortality. "For she alleged God's word, which he denies/ that they should die, but even as gods be wise" (Lanyer, lines 31-32). As the poem continues, so does Lanier's condemnation of both man and God. She points out that Adam had himself heard the word of God when Eve had not, therefore he truly knew better when she did not and possessed both the power and knowledge to refuse Eve's invitation to eat the apple. Lanyer's condemnation of God is slightly more subtle than that of Adam. In the ninth stanza, she points out that if Eve had any evil in her it was due to her being made of Adam. "If any Evill did in her remaine/ being made of him, he was the ground of all/ If one of many worlds could lay a staine/ Vpon our Sexe, and worke so great a fall. To wretched Man, by Satans subtill traine/ What will so fowle a fault amongst you all/ Her weaknesse did the Serpents word obay/ But you in malice Gods deare Sonne betray" (Lanyer, lines 65-72). By telling this story as she does, it is implied that if Adam was evil and Eve gained her evil by being made of Adam's rib,

then it undeniably is on the fault of God for causing women to be evil from the start. Lanyer's condemnation of Adam may be in our focus, but it is God that bears a similar fault for creating Eve as she was. Finishing the stanza, Lanyer also points out that while Eve sinned as a result of weakness, it was men that killed Jesus even after having the knowledge of good and evil.

This is a sharp contrast from the poem we read from George Herbert, "The Reprisal." In this poem, the author not only shows a strong devotion to God but a desire to rid himself of sin as to save Jesus from the ever-existing cycle of cleansing the world of sin. He begs to be made innocent, "that I/ may give a disentangled fate and freedom (Herbert, Lines 5-6)." Herbert continues to lament that God can never truly free him, nor can he ever truly free God. Despite the impossibility of his task, Herbert vows to remain a man of God and works to overcome the sin within himself. He makes himself a martyr for God, his only motive being to give into God's needs. Where Lanyer offers up frustration, Herbert presents as a man embarking on an impossible quest. As a knight rides into battle to save a beautiful princess, Herbert faces the evils of himself and the surrounding world for the sake of God.

It's very clear to see that gender plays a very distinct role in both poems. Lanyer is inherently aware of this, in fact it is her goal. But Herbert's poem suggests that due to his status as a male and the way men and women were often historically viewed within Christian religion, Herbert possesses a certain privilege. He does not carry the weight of blame that Lanyer must carry. He can view himself as inherently holier and more enlightened than his peer. This is not directly stated, but a common opinion at the time. Without the shame and alleged blame of being a woman during his era, Herbert can find a more positive relationship with God. When an entire social structure often works to benefit you, then it is natural to assume that the creator of that social structure has good intentions. Lanyer very clearly understands this and presents it to her readers, guiding them to question their beliefs and form new ones.

Both poems show a very personal relationship with God. They do so while sharing in-depth thoughts, beliefs, and philosophies about God and humanity's role in the world. When considering the era, it's impossible not to see the way status and gender politics affect the way people saw deity. Where one saw a martyr's quest, another saw inequity.